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ABSTRACT

Designing instruction for trainees from abroad is very different from creating similar programs for trainees from the United States. Prescriptions based on these differences should be used with a chosen instructional design model when adapting training designs for other cultures. Instructional design principles apply to instruction for learners from other cultures if the teacher challenges his/her assumptions about the learners. First, a needs analysis should be conducted before training is exported. This includes asking if technology is appropriate to the situation and asking if the objectives are the same. Next, in addition to standard audience analysis, the teacher must give added scrutiny to motivational factors, the level of English comprehension, entry skills and knowledge, and learning style preferences. Based on these analyses, the teacher should examine any existing training materials to determine if delivery methods and instructional strategies are appropriate. Needed revisions must be made. If the instructor is not from the same culture as the students, his or her training should include culture-specific and culture-general training in addition to content training. The course should then be evaluated during a pilot session and revised on the bases of the evaluation. (KC)

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ADAPTING TRAINING FOR OTHER CULTURES

Overview

This paper will deal with the unique differences in designing instruction for trainees from abroad and those from the U.S. Prescriptions based on these differences comprise a set of caveats to use with your chosen instructional design model when adapting training design for other cultures.

The Problem

To introduce this discussion, let's take a look at the problem faced by students studying in a culture other than their native culture. Imagine yourself sitting in a classroom hearing this story.

THE MESSY PRANG

Nigel was looking forward to visiting the Ramsbottoms. He wasn't normally too keen on Lancastrians as a rule, but this particular family had managed to avoid offending his southeastern cultural delusions. This was largely due to the fact that Maud Ramsbottom was a superb cook. In fact, Nigel was so preoccupied with the prospect of three square meals a day, for the next fortnight, that he forgot to stop at a zebra crossing and got a mouthful of expletives from a local yob whom he had nearly run over. Nigel looked around desperately trying to find an excuse for his poor driving. He noticed that one of the bellisha beacons was defective.

"I say old chap, I'm fearfully sorry, but that bellisha wasn't working. I do think that your attitude is unnecessarily offensive."

"Listen 'ere mate, don't come the 'igh and mighty with me. I'm only minding me own business and suddenly some berk in a roller tries to bump me off."

"Hardly my man. In fact, all that happened was that I avoided what could have been a messy prang."

"Messy - I'd have been spread all over the bleeding road like jam. That's the trouble with you stuffed shirts, you don't care about the working bloke."

Nigel couldn't imagine what sort of organization would want to employ a chap like this, but restrained himself and simply apologized profusely before heading up the M1.

He arrived at Maud and Bert Ramsbottom's a couple of hours later. They lived on a large farm and had four children. Maud was a plump, homely woman, and her pretty face lacked the hard haggard look of many Lancastrian women. Bert was a small sprightly man with a ruddy complexion - the product of fresh air, good food and beer. Bert was jolly annoyed that Nigel was late. It was 11:30 a.m., half and hour after opening time. He reluctantly let Nigel go to the loo, and then rushed him off to the Cat and Fiddle to down a few jars.

They returned to the farm at 2:45 p.m. and sat down for lunch. They had a joint for lunch, roast beef with Yorkshire pudding, cabbage, roast potatoes, boiled potatoes, carrots and marrow with gravy. Nigel knew that Maud wouldn't entertain making any fancy veg such as ambergine or courjette, which were commonplace in the Southeast. For afters, they had a large jam roly-poly with custard followed by ale and fruitcake, all washed down with a pint or two of beer, followed by a steaming hot cup of tea after their meal. Nigel liked the way Maud always provided two serviettes per person - Bert wasn't too well versed in table manners, and tended to throw his food around a bit.

As you were reading, what went through your mind? Did you find yourself getting hung up on a word and missing the next few words? If you were asked to describe the scene you just read, could you?

Imagine that there were five objectives that you needed to meet for this story:

1. Explain how Nigel nearly caused a "messy prang."

2. State what Nigel blamed for his poor driving.

3. State the make of car Nigel was driving.

4. State what Maud Ramsbottom looked like.

5. State what Nigel and Bert did before lunch.

You may not be able to answer all of the questions. If you had seen pictures of the story, they may have illustrated some of the unfamiliar terms. Here are the answers.

1. Preoccupied with thoughts of his visit to the Ramsbottom's Nigel did not stop at a crosswalk.

2. The crosswalk signal was not functioning.

3. Rolls Royce

4. Plump and attractive.

5. They went to a bar for some beer.

What generalizations or implications can be made from the experience of reading this story? Some attendees at our workshop have suggested the following implications when they heard the story on tape:

1. Students may know the language and still have difficulty meeting the objectives due to language difficulties such as
   - jargon and idioms
   - unfamiliar vocabulary
2. Visuals may help students understand the story.
3. In order to know if the training design will be adequate for foreign students, you need to do thorough:
   - needs analysis
   - audience analysis
4. In order for the instructor to communicate the material effectively in the classroom, he/she must understand the barriers to communication for students speaking their second language.

The Solution

We have developed a set of strategy components which can be applied to any instructional design model to accommodate cultural and language barriers to communication. For each instructional design component, we have stated a caveat in

the form of a question that must be addressed, and then explained it with a principle and an example.

Needs Analysis

Is the technology appropriate? If a needs analysis is done without considering if the technology is even appropriate to the international group for whom training is to be prepared, then a real needs analysis has not been completed. If only a training solution to the performance problem is considered, then an important group of possible solutions has been missed. For instance, a training organization teaching an accounting method found that their group of French trainees were resisting the training. Upon closer examination, it was found that the training was not the problem. The trainees could not accept the accounting method because the technology was inappropriate to their company. A needs analysis might have exposed the problem with the inappropriateness of the technology and saved the company development costs.

Are the objectives the same? Objectives are based on the difference between what trainees presently know and what they should know. If the objectives for the international audience is not the same as the objectives for the audience for whom the training was originally designed, we risk teaching something trainees do not need or failing to teach something they do need to know. A group of international students recently came to the U.S. for computer maintenance training. Because computers in their home country are designed differently, some modification to the training was needed to avoid teaching them something they would never use when they returned home. In this case, the objectives were similar, but not identical.

Audience Analysis

Are motivation factors the same? What motivates people to learn? Most people learn in order to achieve some desired state, such as a promotion, or pride in acieving excellance. Instruction builds on feedback and reinforcement. Reinforcement done inappropriately, due to an inaccurate assessment of trainee motives, can offend trainees. Or trainees may be bored if they cannot relate instruction to their past experience and desired state. Studies have shown that Native Americans do not respond to instruction using a competitive and individualistic paradigm. They do not wish to appear better or worse than their peers, so they often prefer to sit silently than to compete. Instruction designed for this group should accomodate their unique motivations.

Is the level of English comprehension of the international audience the same as the original audience? If training materials, written or spoken, are above the comprehension level of the audience, they will need much more time to comprehend the training, if they can at all. This is because non-native speakers freqently need time to do internal translation. In a class I took at a university, there was 75% foreign students and 25% Americans. The foreign students were from India, Malaysia, Taiwan, and the Philippines. Once, when we were pressed for time to give presentations we each reacted in one of two ways. Instead of eliminating some material, some of the Americans would either spoke overly long, or spoke faster. Measuring from the questions following the rapid-fire version, it left a much higher percentage of the foreign students lost than the overly long version, which gave them more time to translate internally.

Are entry skills and knowledge the same? As mentioned under objectives, if entry skills and knowledge differ from the original audience for the training, we risk over- or under-instructing. In one case, U.S. participants in a computer training course had been promoted from the word processing department. The European participants, however, were hired specifically for their position, and already had computer skills. Their entry skills were very different. If the training had been designed specifically for either group, the other group would have been at a disadvantage. The chosen solution was to design the course in modules that could be used or omitted, depending on the entry skills of the participants.

Are learning style preferences the same? People learn in all types of different ways. Bernice McCarthy, in her book Formats, postulates that people learn different ways. While all people learn differently, there has been some speculation that particular groups may also have a group learning style preference. This may be attributed to what they are used to or what they are practiced at. For example, countries with an ideographic written language, such as Chinese, may prefer, and be better at, visualizing imagery than groups with a more abstract, linear written language. Another example is the Girl Scouts who designed an educational package for their troop leaders that used the best of creative classroom techniques, such as simulations and role plays. Unfortunately, this is not the type of learning that the women were used to. They were very uncomfortable, and learned with great difficulty. They were much more comfortable when the leadership training returned to a traditional lecture format.

Training analysis

Armed with information from the needs and audience analysis, we can begin the analysis of the existing training. The first questions addressed will be; is the delivery method appropriate and are instructional strategies appropriate? The delivery method and instructional strategies include the type of media, if the delivery is to be stand-up lecture, CAI, self-paced written material, discussion, role-plays, simulations, guided discovery, etc. As mentioned under "audience analysis," there seem to be cultural differences in what will be an effective teaching method. A Chinese manager visiting our facility was concerned about the classroom arrangements and delivery of instruction. He was very relieved when I told him that his subordinates would study in a classroom set up in a traditional classroom style with rows of tables and chairs, and an instructor would primarily lecture. He expected the instructor to take the role of authority figure, and students could sit according to rank and seniority. If the existing delivery methods or instructional strategies are inappropriate, the training may need to be revised.

Are printed materials adequate and appropriate? Because international students may be studying in a second, or weaker language, much of the the verbal portion of the training can be difficult to keep up with. In this case, the burden of the instruction may fall on the written material. Students may study the materials in the evening, or read along in class. Unless trainees are equal in their English comprehension to the original training audience, they would benefit if you modify course materials to:

1. Simplify sentence structure
2. Simplify complex tenses (use active-voice verbs wherever possible)
3. Make language concrete, and avoid extensive metaphors and similes
4. Use terminology consistently
5. Use fewer idioms, jargon, contractions and acronyms
6. Make examples and analogies meaningful to trainees

There could be vast numbers of examples for this principle. I will give one. An Indian student in one of my classes, Hari, was assigned to read an article by Gavriel Solomon on

learning. Hari did not understand the terms "analogical" and "digital" communication in the context of Solomon's article. He was familiar with the technical meanings of the word, and did not realize that Solomon had used the words as analogies. Until it was explained, the analogy was not meaningful to him.

Closely related to printed materials are the verbal materials. Are verbal materials adequate and appropriate? If verbal material in media is not clear, or is culturally inappropriate, trainees may not understand what is being said, or they may become confused or angry due to culturally inappropriate behavior. I once watched a film with a class that used language borrowed from baseball and other sports. For me, it was a clever device, but for foreign students who did not share my field of reference, it did not communicate adequately.

Another question which must be asked about media is about visual materials. Are visual materials adequate and appropriate? Visuals can communicate very well, even when there is a language problem. Be sure to use visuals whenever appropriate, to help convey your point. The following five guidelines can improve visuals in course materials:

1. Unclutter visuals
2. Use visuals consistently (don't switch styles, or types of visuals)
3. Use cuing devices such as highlighting clearly and consistently
4. Use captions on visuals
5. Refer to visuals in the text

The following illustration shows how effective visuals can be. Last month, we had a visitor from China observing our computer lab, where hands-on instruction takes place. He tried asking our lab manager a technical question in heavily accented English. The lab manager didn't understand, so the Chinese gentleman drew a picture on the blackboard, and gestured to the area in question. The lab manager understood perfectly, and answered the question to the satisfaction of the Chinese gentleman. We frequently fail to take advantage of this power to communicate by missing opportunities to create visuals, or settling for a "visual" with nothing but words on it. Visuals may range from very abstract to very representational. More representational

visuals need fewer words to explain and support them, so they are better able to overcome language barriers.

After doing all of the previous analysis, you are ready to ask the crucial question: can training materials be adapted, or must new training materials be designed and developed?

Train the Trainer

After adaptation or design and development, and before your international students arrive, you must train the trainer. If the trainer is from a different culture than the students, he or she may need to learn some cultural finesse in addition to learning the content of the course. There are two types of training, that I would recommend: culture specific and culture general. Culture specific training is learning about the specific culture trainees are coming from. Culture general training (also known as cross-cultural training or cultural sensitivity training) teaches people to be aware of the influence of cultural differences that could cause communication barriers, and teaches problem-solving skills to overcome communication barriers. There are many resources and organizations that provide this type of training. Applying cross-cultural concerns to the classroom yields the following list of general classroom skills that will help overcome communication barriers:

1. Speak slowly and clearly.
2. Use terminology consistently.
3. Do not use idioms, jargon or slang.
4. Repeat important ideas expressed in different ways.
5. Use short sentences with active verbs.
6. Use your visuals.
7. Pause frequently, and give breaks.
8. Summarize periodically.
9. Never criticize or tease.
10. Check comprehension by asking for a verbal or written reiteration of the material.

11. Determine what is appropriate reward or encouragement in the culture and use it.

12. Show interest in your learner's culture.

Pilot Test and Evaluation

The final step in adapting training design for other cultures is the pilot test and evaluation of training. There are two unique concerns in addition to the usual evaluation concerns that must be resolved when evaluating training across cultures. The first concern is: are evaluation instruments understandable? If you want valid results, trainees must understand the language of the instrument. An accounting firm was evaluating training taken by a group of trainees in Denmark. A question on the evaluation asked if the material was "broken-up" into appropriate size lessons. The trainees could not answer the question, because they could not understand how training could be broken (like glass is broken).

The second concern is: will evaluation instruments be accurate? Make sure your instrument will measure what you want measured. A native of the culture you are evaluating can be an invaluable consultant on the evaluation tools. In some places in the world, opinion surveys will get what the trainee thinks you want to hear, not the not fill them out. In cases like this, an ethnomethodological method will work better. Ethnomethodological methods were invented by cultural anthropologists to overcome these problems. The methods include personal interviews, listening to trainees conversations with each other, observation, and various other methods.

Revision

The last step to the process is to revise as necessary.

Summary

There are a few unique things to remember when designing instruction for students from another culture. Instructional design principles apply to instruction for learners from other cultures if you make sure to challenge your assumptions about the learners. A separate needs analysis should be conducted before training is exported. This includes asking if technology is appropriate to the situation, and asking if the objectives are the same. Next, in addition to your standard audience analysis, you must give added scrutiny to motivational factors, the level of

English comprehension, and entry skills and knowledge, and learning style preferences.

Based on these analyses, examine any existing training materials to determine if delivery methods and instructional strategies are appropriate, and if printed, verbal and visual materials are appropriate. You may decide to revise existing material or design new materials for the foreign audience.

If the instructor will not be from the same culture as his or her students, his training should include culture specific and culture general training in addition to content training.

The course will then be evaluated during a pilot session of the course. Be sure to examine your evaluation instruments to see if they are understandable and will produce accurate data. Lastly, revise your materials based on your evaluation.

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